

**NEWS RELEASE**  
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**"HELPING PEOPLE HELP THE LAND"**

**USDA & UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE PARTNERSHIP TO HELP RESTORE**  
**NATIVE HARDWOOD WETLANDS IN WEST TENNESSEE**

**NASHVILLE, TN**—The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is awarding more than \$163,000 to the University of Tennessee to develop tools to help scientists preserve the state's native hardwood wetlands.

Since 1992, nearly 10,000 acres of previously farmed agricultural lands have been voluntarily restored to their original wetland status by private landowners in Tennessee. The NRCS grant will provide resources to the University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture to develop tools to measure how successful those land restorations have been.

James Ford, Tennessee's State Conservationist, says the grant will improve the way NRCS completes its work. "Until now we haven't had a good method to help us measure how successful our hardwood wetland restoration efforts have been. This grant will result in a tool to tell us how effectively we're restoring land back to its natural state. It will make our present work better and greatly improve all our future work"

Dr. Matthew Gray, a wetlands ecologist with the UT Department of Forestry, Wildlife, and Fisheries, will oversee the project. His team will study several recently restored sites and compare them to the Hatchie River bottomland in West Tennessee, which is relatively untouched, with about 140,000 acres of mature hardwood forests associated with it. Dr. Gray says the Hatchie River bottom will provide a good baseline comparison for the extent of restoration success on NRCS sites. "Our goal is to use this work in Tennessee to develop a mathematical tool that NRCS biologists can use to quantify the extent of ecological restoration on wetland sites that were previously disturbed by agriculture and have been replanted with native tree seedlings. The tools that we develop also may be useful for NRCS biologists in other states in the Southeast region." His team will look at several factors, including soil, vegetation, water movement, and the presence of birds, amphibians, and other wildlife.

The project will take place in West Tennessee, and study sites will be chosen randomly from each of 15 West Tennessee counties, including Carroll, Chester, Dyer, Gibson, Hardeman, Hardin, Haywood, Henderson, Henry, Lake, Lauderdale, Madison, Obion, Tipton, and Weakley. The three-year project will begin in January 2007.

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